

# Boulder County Comprehensive Plan Approved – Public Health Element

## I. Purpose

Keeping our communities healthy means ensuring that all residents can breathe clean air, drink clean water, have safe places to live, be active and experience the health benefits of open space, access and afford healthy food, experience minimal risk from substance abuse and violence, and are prepared for the health effects of climate change. The *Public Health Element* is a blueprint of the Boulder County Public Health Department's (BCPH) vision: that Boulder County is a socially just, inclusive community where physical and mental health, social well-being, and the environment are valued, supported, and accessible to all.

Section II provides a brief overview of public health in Boulder County. It includes an overarching framework, definitions, BCPH's guiding principles and the priorities set by our community and BCPH. Section III presents goals and policies for the Public Health element.

Other elements of the BCCP reference and support health, including the Environmental Resources, Transportation, Natural Hazards, Agriculture, Housing, Sustainability, and Economics elements. The goals and policies in this Public Health element bolster and complement health-related content in other elements, and address additional topics related to public and environmental health. Therefore, this element can serve as a single, comprehensive reference point for health-related goals and policies.

## II. Boulder County Public Health

### a) Public Health Framework and Overview

Boulder County generally enjoys the reputation of being a prosperous and healthy place, and it is recognized nationally as a community that values local food and farms, bike paths and hiking trails, open space preservation, and the creation of affordable housing. Health data for Boulder County reflects our community's investments in health; in general, smoking rates are lower than the state average, residents eat more fruits and vegetables, exercise more often, and have lower rates of chronic disease than the nation as a whole.

However, looking only at broad health data does not provide a full picture of Boulder County's community health. A closer look through an equity lens reveals that not all members of the county have equal access to such health and quality of life. Nearly 20 percent of children live in poverty, binge-drinking rates are among the highest in the nation, and child obesity rates are increasing. For these reasons, BCPH is committed to addressing the root causes of health inequities and reducing barriers to health equity so that all residents have the opportunity for a healthy life.

### *Information to Implement in Sidebar*

*Boulder County Public Health maintains community level health data on its website in order to assess and evaluate health outcomes.*

*[https://www.cohealthmaps.dphe.state.co.us/cdphe\\_community\\_health\\_equity\\_map/](https://www.cohealthmaps.dphe.state.co.us/cdphe_community_health_equity_map/) These data contain the Estimated Life Expectancy at Birth for residents of census tracts across the State of Colorado based on vital records data from 2010-2015.*

Boulder County's public health goals and policies can create a framework to improve equity and reduce disparities. These goals and policies acknowledge the complex system of social, economic,

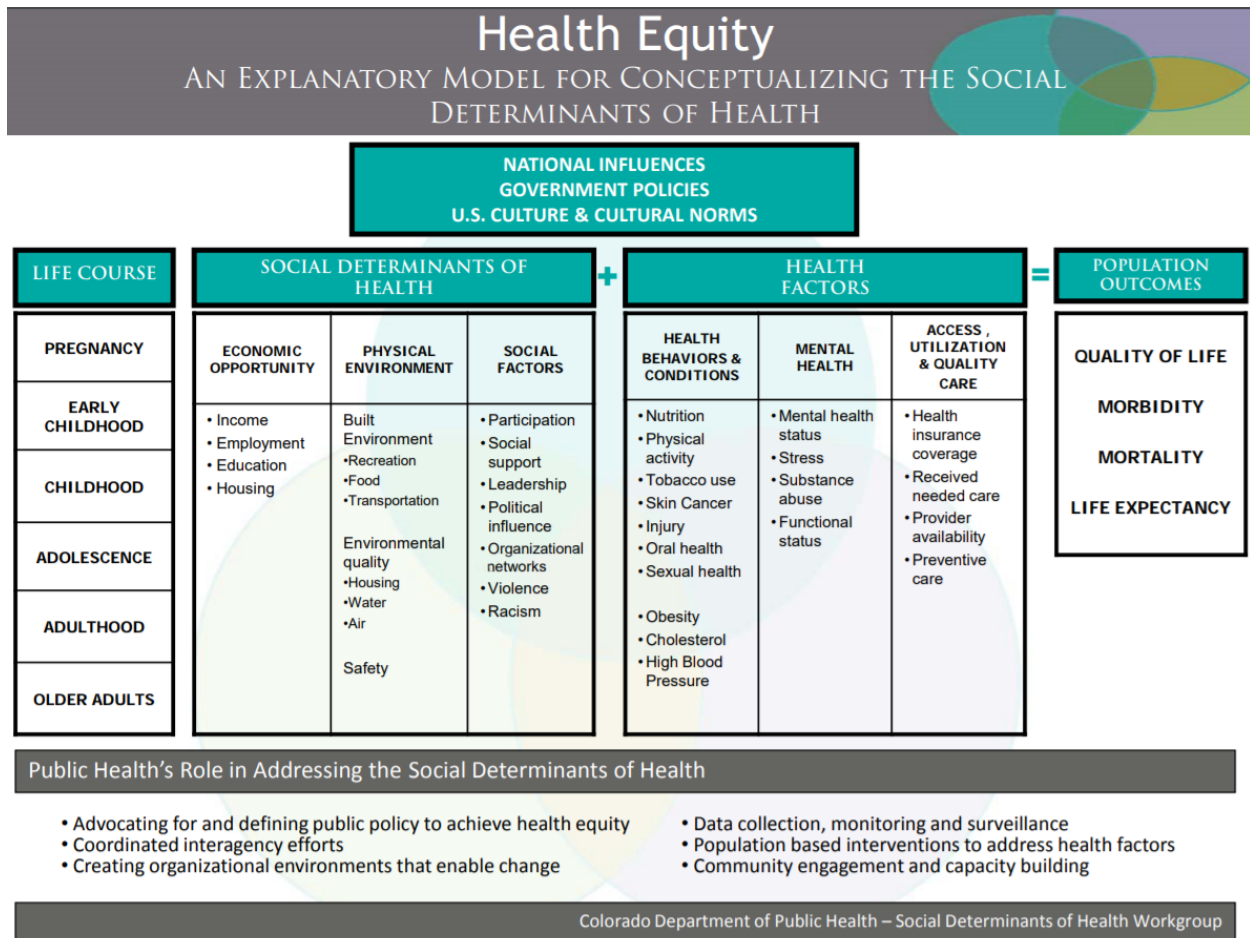
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and environmental factors that influence individual and community health outcomes over the course of life. These factors, often referred to as the social determinants of health, are further detailed in Figure 1 below.

Overarching goal and policy statements in this chapter highlight the communities’ health priorities and provide the broad vision for supporting health in Boulder County. Ensuring that health and equity are considered when making decisions regarding our communities’ future is based on national best practices in public health. Developing population-level health policies that seek to improve health and the supporting built and natural environments allows us to work toward reducing health inequities and improve health outcomes for everyone in Boulder County. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, developing and implementing policies that impact socioeconomic factors and change the environment to make the healthy choice the default have the greatest impact on population-level health outcomes.

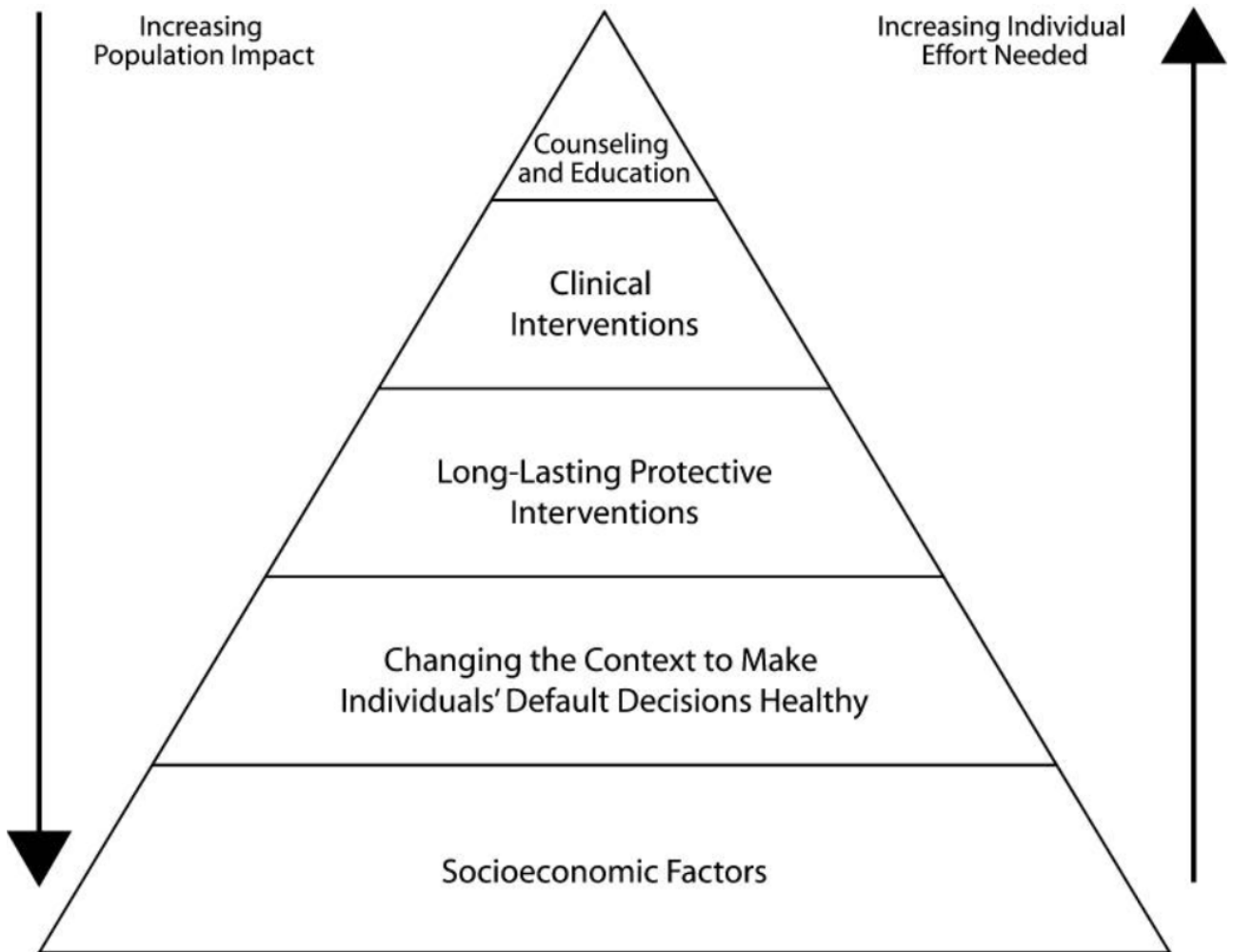
Health interventions that address the social determinants of health can have a larger impact on the health of a population than interventions that focus on one individual.

**Figure 1. Colorado Department of Public Health the Environment’s Health Equity Model**



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Figure 2. The Health Impact Pyramid



## b) Public Health Definitions and Guiding Principles

**Health:** A "state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity<sup>1</sup>."

**Health Disparity:** A type of difference in health that is closely linked with social or economic disadvantage. Health disparities negatively affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater social or economic obstacles to health. These obstacles stem from characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion such as race or ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, mental health, sexual orientation, or geographic location. Other characteristics include cognitive, sensory, or physical disability.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2020 Draft. 2009, U.S. Government Printing Office.

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**Health Equity:** The realization by all people of the highest attainable level of health. Achieving health equity requires valuing all individuals and populations equally. It entails focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities by ensuring the conditions for optimal health for all groups, particularly those who have experienced historical or contemporary injustices or socioeconomic disadvantage.<sup>3</sup>

**Health Inequity:** A difference or disparity in health outcomes that is systematic, avoidable, and unjust.<sup>4</sup>

**Mental Health:** A state of well-being. Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.<sup>5</sup>

**Population Health:** The distribution of health outcomes within a population, the range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that influence the distribution of health outcomes, and the policies and interventions that affect those factors.

**Social Determinants of Health:** The complex, integrated, and overlapping social structures and economic systems that are responsible for most health inequities. These social structures and economic systems include the social environment, physical environment, health services, and structural and societal factors. Social determinants of health are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources throughout local communities, nations, and the world.<sup>6</sup>

#### Boulder County Public Health Guiding Principles <sup>7</sup>

The following key principles describe the actions we will take to conduct our public health work in order to make significant and sustainable improvements to health in Boulder County.

1. Use data and community input to identify factors that significantly impact equity, health, and quality of life. Employ evidence-based strategies and evaluation to inform decisions, assure quality, and demonstrate outcomes in policies and programs.
2. Initiate, enhance, and promote efforts to address the social determinants of health to ensure health equity for all people in Boulder County. Support community capacity in leadership and organizing that demonstrates collective power to affect change and influence public health programming, policy, and systems change efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> Adewale Troutman, Social justice, health equity and healthy communities. The Nation's Health May/June 2013, 43 (4) 3

<sup>4</sup> Whitehead, M. and Whitehead, The concepts and principles of equity and health. Health Promotion International, 1991. 6(3): p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/)

<sup>6</sup> Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH), Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Final report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. 2008, World Health Organization: Geneva.

<sup>7</sup> These Guiding Principles are included in BCPH's Five Year Strategy Plan.

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3. Promote primary prevention and population-based approaches to maximize health impact at the broadest possible level, while intentionally targeting prevention resources toward populations that are experiencing inequities.
4. Collaborate across sectors to initiate and strengthen partnerships toward making a collective impact to ensure common goals, shared measurement, coordination of activities, and reduced duplication.
5. Clarify appropriate roles of BCPH and our partners in the public health system.
6. Ensure that people in Boulder County are empowered and equipped to make informed decisions for adopting healthy behaviors.
7. Educate and influence policy makers so they are able to set policies that protect and enhance the health of individuals, families, communities, and the environment.
8. Implement strategies in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

### **c) Public Health Priorities**

Every five years, each local public health agency in Colorado uses data to examine the health of the community it serves and identify solutions to address the important health issues found in the assessment. The Community Health Assessment is required every five years for all local public health agencies per the Colorado Public Health Act of 2008 (SB 08-194, CRS §§ 25-1-501 et seq.) and the national Public Health Accreditation Board. The Assessment guides BCPH's Public Health Improvement Plan.

#### **Information to Implement in Sidebar**

*In 2017, BCPH conducted a thorough assessment of the health of our county's residents. Along with extensive analysis of demographic and health data, the assessment included conversations with groups of residents to ensure that the community perspective was included, particularly from those experiencing barriers to health (i.e. health inequities). The results of these conversations were utilized to inform the creation of this Public Health element. Residents, stakeholders, and partners voted and identified mental health as the focus for BCPH and community partners for the 2018-2023 five-year period.*

### **III. Goals and Policies**

The goals and policies presented here reflect public health priorities for Boulder County. In addition to providing policy direction for decision making in Boulder County, these provide broad guidance for consideration during specific master plan updates (e.g., the county's Environmental Sustainability Plan, Transportation Master Plan, and department-level master plans).

**Goal 1. Fostering Healthy Families and Communities.** Boulder County values and creates environments that foster healthy families and communities.

#### **Policies**

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- PH 1.01 **Air Quality.** Boulder County recognizes the direct and secondary health impacts of outdoor air pollution produced by industrial, vehicular and other sources. The county collaborates with industry, state and neighboring governments to respond to and mitigate the health impacts of poor air quality due to particulate matter, ground-level ozone, smoke from wildfires, greenhouse gases and other air pollutants.
- PH 1.02 **Equitable Economic Development.** Boulder County supports policies and equitable economic development that increase the number and availability of living wage jobs, as well as jobs with paid sick leave.
- PH 1.03 **Childcare Services.** Boulder County supports efforts to ensure that adequate childcare facilities are located throughout Boulder County, especially in mountain communities and other rural, underserved areas.
- PH 1.04 **Family Friendly Workplaces.** Boulder County supports the creation and adoption of family leave policies and family friendly workplaces.
- PH 1.05 **Substance Use.** Boulder County works to reduce youth and adult substance use by limiting residents' exposure to secondhand smoke and vapors, as well as considering the location and proximity of marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco facilities to youth-facing buildings.
- PH 1.06 **Harm Reduction Strategies.** Boulder County understands the importance of harm reduction strategies to combat substance use disorders and works with partners and experts to determine appropriate interventions, such as syringe exchange sites, clinics and recovery residences, and prescription disposal and/or diversion sites.
- PH 1.07 **Mental Health Resources and Safe Places.** Boulder County supports program and policy changes to address the shortage of mental health resources in schools, enhance suicide prevention, and create safe spaces for young people, free of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion.
- PH 1.08 **Gun Violence.** Boulder County recognizes gun violence as a public health issue and supports the safe storage of guns, further research into injury prevention strategies, and efforts to minimize risk related to gun violence.
- PH 1.09 **Affordable Health and Mental Health Care.** Boulder County encourages efforts to increase access to and enrollment in affordable health and mental healthcare.
- PH 1.010 **Healthy Foods and Beverage Environments.** Boulder County works to improve food and beverage environments (i.e., places where food and drinks are sold), access to clean water, and local, healthy, and nutritious foods for all residents regardless of income.

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**Goal 2. Promote Safe and Healthy Recreation and Connections to Nature.** Boulder County collaborates with partners and municipalities to promote safe and healthy recreation and access to open spaces and nature that support physical and mental health.

**Policies**

- PH 2.01 **Open Space and Nature.** Boulder County recognizes and values the physical and mental health benefits of open space areas, trails, and amenities that allow members of the public to safely enjoy the outdoors and connect with nature.
- PH 2.02 **Outdoor Access and Programing.** Boulder County strives to understand and meet the preferences and needs of all visitors and residents for nature access and programing with particular attention to providing access and programming to historically marginalized, elderly, differently abled, young and low-income populations.

**Goal 3. Transportation Safety and Accessibility.** Boulder County supports transportation infrastructure and programs that are safe and accessible for all residents regardless of geography or transportation mode to improve mobility options for all.

**Policies**

- PH 3.01 **Injury Prevention.** Boulder County strives to eliminate severe injuries and fatalities on the transportation network in unincorporated Boulder County through engineering, encouragement, education, and enforcement projects and programs.
- PH 3.02 **Employment and Services Access.** Boulder County supports partnerships with community organizations and transportation providers to improve transportation options for residents in rural and mountain communities, with the goal of increasing access to job opportunities, education, healthcare, mental health services and social services.
- PH 3.03 **Existing Resource Outreach.** Boulder County partners with local and regional partners to provide outreach and increase awareness of existing transportation resources in rural and mountain communities.
- PH 3.04 **Active and Multimodal Transportation.** Boulder County supports active and multimodal forms of transportation, such as biking, walking and public transit, to help improve opportunities for exercise as well as reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Boulder County will continue to work with local and regional partners to improve the safety, accessibility and attractiveness of infrastructure that supports these modes.

**Goal 4. Preserve Regional Agriculture and Local Food Systems.** Boulder County supports the local food system, access to affordable healthy food, and community farming to preserve regional agriculture and increase communities' health and resiliency.

**Policies**

- PH 4.01 **Fruit and Vegetable Consumption and Production.** Boulder County encourages fruit and vegetable consumption and specifically projects that increase healthy food access for low-income populations through production and other means.

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- PH 4.02 **Gleaning Efforts.** Boulder County recognizes the value of gleaning efforts that support healthy food distribution for low-income residents.
- PH 4.03 **Affordable Healthy Foods Access.** Boulder County partners with community organizations to increase access to affordable, healthy foods at food distribution locations and seeks to increase access to healthy food in lower resourced areas, such as rural and mountain communities.
- PH 4.04 **Local Healthy Food Distribution.** Boulder County monitors and seeks opportunities to support (e.g., through information sharing, regulations, and access to program resources) grocers and other healthy food retailers across our communities, as well as local farmers, farm stands, farmers markets, and other sources and distribution channels for locally-produced food products.
- PH 4.05 **Local Agriculture Viability.** Boulder County helps protect the viability of local agriculture to ensure local food production and supply by seeking to address the needs of farmers, ranchers, and other local food producers, and supporting the adoption of regenerative, biodynamic, and other resilient agricultural practices.

**Goal 5. Creation, Conservation and Preservation of Existing Affordable Housing.** Boulder County recognizes safe, stable and healthy housing as a social determinant of health and prioritizes the creation, conservation and preservation of existing affordable housing to align with the county’s affordable housing goals.

**Policies**

- PH 5.01 **Affordable Housing.** Boulder County recognizes there is a connection between individuals having safe, affordable housing and their physical and mental health, and the county supports efforts to create, conserve and preserve affordable housing.
- PH 5.02 **Manufactured and Mobile Homes.** Boulder County supports legislative efforts that provide additional protections for manufactured and mobile home park residents to support the physical and mental health of those residents and the preservation of affordable housing.
- PH 5.03 **Displacement Mitigation.** The county evaluates its policies and regulations to minimize the negative effects of displacement on low-income persons when housing sites are redeveloped by the private sector.

**Goal 6. Healthy and Safe Structures.** Boulder County supports efforts to ensure that structures have healthy indoor air quality, structural integrity and reasonable safety features to protect occupants.

- PH 6.01 **Radon Testing.** Boulder County requires radon testing and passive mitigation systems in new homes, and radon testing for major renovations (e.g. when finishing a basement); the county encourages radon testing and mitigation in all other new and existing occupied buildings.
- PH 6.02 **Best Practices.** Boulder County supports healthy and safe rental housing and provides landlords and tenants with guidance on best practices for use of smoke detectors, CO monitors, radon testing, mold remediation, and hazardous materials cleanup. The county



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supports exploration into the feasibility and benefits of rental licensing and inspection programs.

- PH 6.03 **Remediation.** Boulder County recognizes the importance of remediation efforts that reduce exposure to methamphetamine, lead, asbestos, and other potentially hazardous materials that may be found in households and warrant review upon change in ownership and occupancy of a structure.

**Goal 7. Climate Change.** Boulder County works to minimize and mitigate the negative effects of climate change-driven hazards on physical, mental, and environmental health.

**Policies**

- PH 7.01 **Minimize Climate Change Impacts.** Boulder County works to minimize the negative impacts of climate change through education, long range and emergency preparedness planning and resiliency efforts that seek to reduce the threat of climate-induced emergencies, such as high heat, drought, flooding, wildfire, and food and water shortages, on the most vulnerable residents.
- PH 7.02 **Protect from Climate Change Impacts.** Boulder County works to track emerging vector borne diseases that impact our region, and collaborates with national and state partners to ensure preventative measures are taken to protect public health and minimize the negative health impacts of climate change.
- PH 7.03 **Minimize Effects of Climate Change on Health.** Boulder County recognizes that climate change can cause and intensify stress and anxiety, adversely affecting health and the county seeks opportunities to minimize those impacts through mitigating climate change.

***Content for Text Box:***

***Events such as extreme storms or extreme heat can lead to depression, anger, and even violence. Everyone is at risk, but not everyone is affected equally. Groups that are especially vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change include children, the elderly, and women. Also at risk are disadvantaged groups, those with existing mental illness, and those with close ties to the land, including farmers and tribal communities.***

**Goal 8. Engage, Educate and Collaborate.** Boulder County actively engages and collaborates with stakeholders and partners to promote public health values.

- PH 8.01 **Outreach.** Boulder County maintains strong outreach to the community, including offering public education activities, promoting awareness of the county’s health data and community priorities, and providing robust opportunities for members of the public to provide input on future planning and programs.
- PH 8.02 **Collaboration.** Boulder County collaborates and partners with communities and other regional stakeholders in identifying and addressing public health priorities.